



# Oregon Donation Land Files, 1851-1903

United States “How to” Guide, Intermediate Level: Instruction

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## GOAL

This guide will teach you how to locate your ancestor in the Oregon Land Claim index and find the original land claim application file images.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1850 the United States enacted the “The Donation Land Claim Act of 1850,” opening the way for homestead settlements in the Oregon Territory. At this time the Oregon Territory included present-day states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho and part of Wyoming.

While the only requirement was to cultivate and improve the land for four years, the amount of land and price varied as follows:

### Early - 1 December 1850

- The land cost nothing.
- Single men could receive 320 acres of land.
- Married couples could receive 640 acres ( $\frac{1}{2}$  in the name of the man and  $\frac{1}{2}$  in the name of the woman).

### 1 December 1850 – 1853

- The land cost nothing.
- Single men could receive 160 acres of land.
- Married couples could receive 320 acres ( $\frac{1}{2}$  in the name of the man and  $\frac{1}{2}$  in the name of the woman).

### 1854-1855

- The land cost \$1.25 per acre.
- Single men could receive 160 acres of land.
- Married couples could receive 320 acres ( $\frac{1}{2}$  in the name of the man and  $\frac{1}{2}$  in the name of the woman).

If you have ancestors who settled in the Oregon Territory during this time, the Donation Land Claim application files may hold genealogically rich information about your family. The records may contain birth, marriage, citizenship, migration or other valuable information.

## HOW TO

The original land claim applications are filed by land office and then by certificate number. To identify if your ancestor filed a claim you will need to know the land office and the certificate number. You find the land office and certificate number by searching one of the following indexes:

- *Bureau of Land Management General Land Office* <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/default.aspx>
- *Genealogical Forum of Oregon* <https://gfo.org/>

The *Bureau of Land Management General Land Office Records* only contain the patents. The *Genealogical Forum of Oregon* contains both patents and cancelled land claims, the documents created when a land claim was not completed.

We will practice how to use **both** indexes.

### Accessing the Index at the *Bureau of Land Management General Land Office*

1. Go to the *Bureau of Land Management General Land Office*, found at: <https://glorerecords.blm.gov>
2. In the green navigation bar click **Search Documents**.
3. Follow the instructions on the right side of the **Location** and **Names** entry boxes. Filter the location by the state of **Oregon** and enter your ancestor's **first** and **last name**.
4. In the **Miscellaneous** entry box, click the drop-down menu for **Authority**. Select **Oregon-Donation Act (grant) [Sep 27, 1850] (99 Stat. 496)**.
5. Click **Search Patents**.
6. From the list of results, click the number in the **Accession** column to view the entry for your ancestor. You will notice that many of the patents have dates that are later than 1855. These are the dates the final papers were filed, not the date of the application.
7. A new page will open. Under **Miscellaneous Information** you will find the **land office** and **authority**. Under **Document Numbers** you will find the certificate number, called **Document Nr**.
8. Record the land office and the certificate number. You will need this information to locate the original Donation Land Claim application file. Proceed to **Finding the Original Land Claim Application File**, located later in this guide.

### Accessing the Index at the *Genealogical Forum of Oregon*

1. Go to *Genealogical Forum of Oregon* <https://gfo.org/>
2. From the home page *hover* the mouse over **Resources**. From the drop-down menu, *hover*

the mouse over **Indexes**, then **Pioneers and Early Oregonians**, then click **Donation Land Claims**.

3. Follow the website's instructions for choosing the correct set of index pages for your ancestor's surname. Click the **name** that begins the collection that includes the surname. When the page opens, scroll down until you locate your ancestor.
4. When you find your ancestor, record the land office and the certificate number. Oregon had four land offices and the *Genealogical Forum of Oregon* uses the following abbreviations:
  - OC – Oregon City
  - RB – Roseburg
  - TD – The Dalles
  - LG – La Grande

Once you have the land office and certificate number you are ready to locate the original land claim file application.

### **Finding the Original Land Claim Application File**

1. Go to FamilySearch, at: <https://www.familysearch.org/> Log into your FamilySearch account.
2. Hover the mouse over **Search**, then click **Catalog**.
3. From the Catalog search page choose **Titles** and enter **Oregon and Washington donation land files, 1851-1903**. The author is U.S. General Land Office.
4. Read the **Notes** section to learn how the collection is organized.
5. Scroll down to the **Film/Digital Notes** section.
6. The list of microfilms is organized by land office, beginning with the Oregon City land office. Either scroll down until you see a film that contains the name of the **land office** where the claim was filed or hold down the **control** and **F** keys (**command** and **F** when using a Mac) to activate the find feature. Search for the name of the **land office** to find the film that begins the collection of land claims for that office.
7. Underneath the film that contains the name of the land office will be a collection of films, organized by **donation certificate number**. Scroll down to the film that contains the certificate number you wish to view.
8. When you find the correct record set click the **digital camera icon** to the right of the collection name to open the digitized microfilm.
9. Browse through the images to find your ancestor's certificate number. Each packet begins with the image of a small packet folder; these can help you locate the file more quickly. An individual file may include several documents across a range of images. You will want to view the entire file.

### **Additional information found in FamilySearch research wiki articles**

- Oregon Land and Property  
[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Oregon\\_Land\\_and\\_Property](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Oregon_Land_and_Property)
- Government Land Grants  
[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Government\\_Land\\_Grants](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Government_Land_Grants)

## PRACTICE

Now let's practice finding the Oregon Land Donation Claim application for William and Polly Ann Leach. Start with finding William in the index so you can find the land office and certificate number.

1. Go to *Bureau of Land Management General Land Office*: <https://gloreCORDS.blm.gov/>
2. From the home page click **Search Documents**.
3. Following the instructions on the right side, enter the information below into the search boxes and click enter.  
 State: Oregon  
 County: Any County  
 Last Name: Leach  
 First Name: William  
 Authority: Oregon-Donation Act (grant) [Sep 27, 1850] (99 Stat. 496)
4. Click **Search Patents**.
5. To locate the land office and the certificate number click on the number in the **Accession** column for the entry that includes William Leach and Polly Ann Leach.

What is the land office where the file was recorded?	Roseburg
What is the certificate number?	1544

Before locating the original file, try using the Oregon Genealogical Forum index to find the office name and certificate number.

1. Go to Oregon Genealogical Forum <https://gfo.org/>
2. *Hover* your mouse over **Resources**, then **Indexes**, then **Pioneers and Early Oregonians**. Click **Donation Land Claims**.
3. William Leach's file would appear in the index that begins with **Knowlton, George E**. Click the link to open this index.
4. When the page opens scroll down until you locate **Leach, Wm & w.** [wife]
5. Record the land office and the certificate number. **Write them down**.

What is the land office where the file was recorded?	Roseburg
What is the certificate number?	1544

Now that you know the Land Office is **Roseburg**, and the certificate number is **1544**, you are ready to locate the original Donation Land Claim application file.

1. Go to FamilySearch <https://www.familysearch.org/>
2. Hover the mouse over **Search**, then click **Catalog**.
3. From the Catalog search page click **Titles** and enter “**Oregon and Washington donation land files, 1851-1903.**”
4. Scroll down to the Roseburg record sets and locate the entry range for certificate no. 1544.

What is the collection that includes William Leach's claim?	Donation Certificates no. 1466-1555 (NARA Series M815, Roll 82)
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5. Open the digitized microfilm by clicking on the digital camera icon.
6. Browse the images until you find certificate number 1544. It is found on image 779.

What county did William make a claim in?	Linn (image 781, 782)
When did William arrive in Oregon?	Oct 1852 (image 783)
Where was William born and in what year?	Illinois, 1820 (image 783)
When did William marry Polly Ann?	Aug 1845 (image 783, 784)
Who was the witness to the fact that William and Polly Ann were husband and wife?	Thomas J. Martin (image 784)
How many pages are in the William Leach file?	8 pages (images 779-786)

## ACTIVITY

Now, test your skills you have learned in this “How to” Guide. The Activity is a way to check your knowledge and let you know you’ve mastered the Guide! Click [here](#) to try out the Activity.